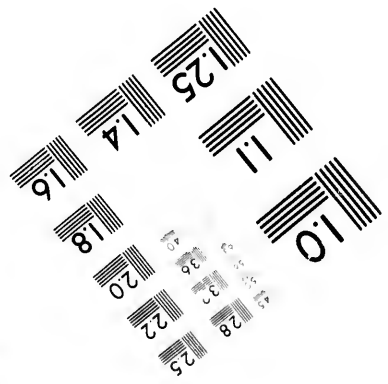
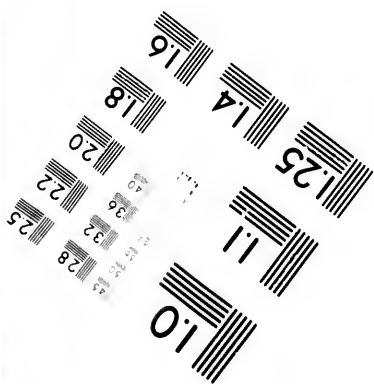
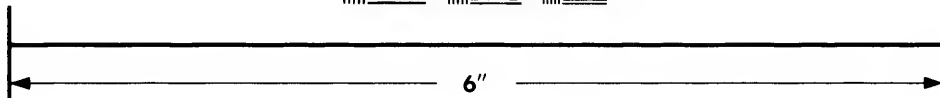
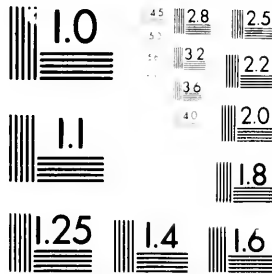


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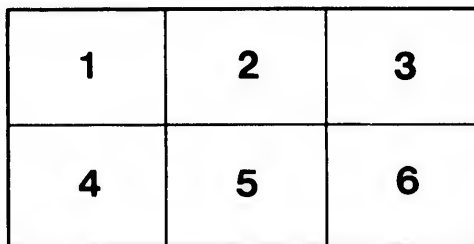
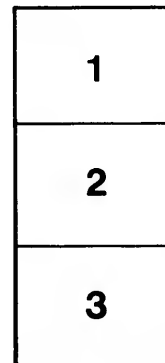
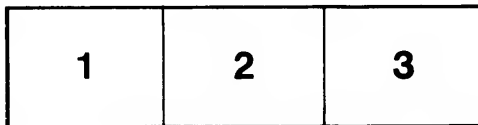
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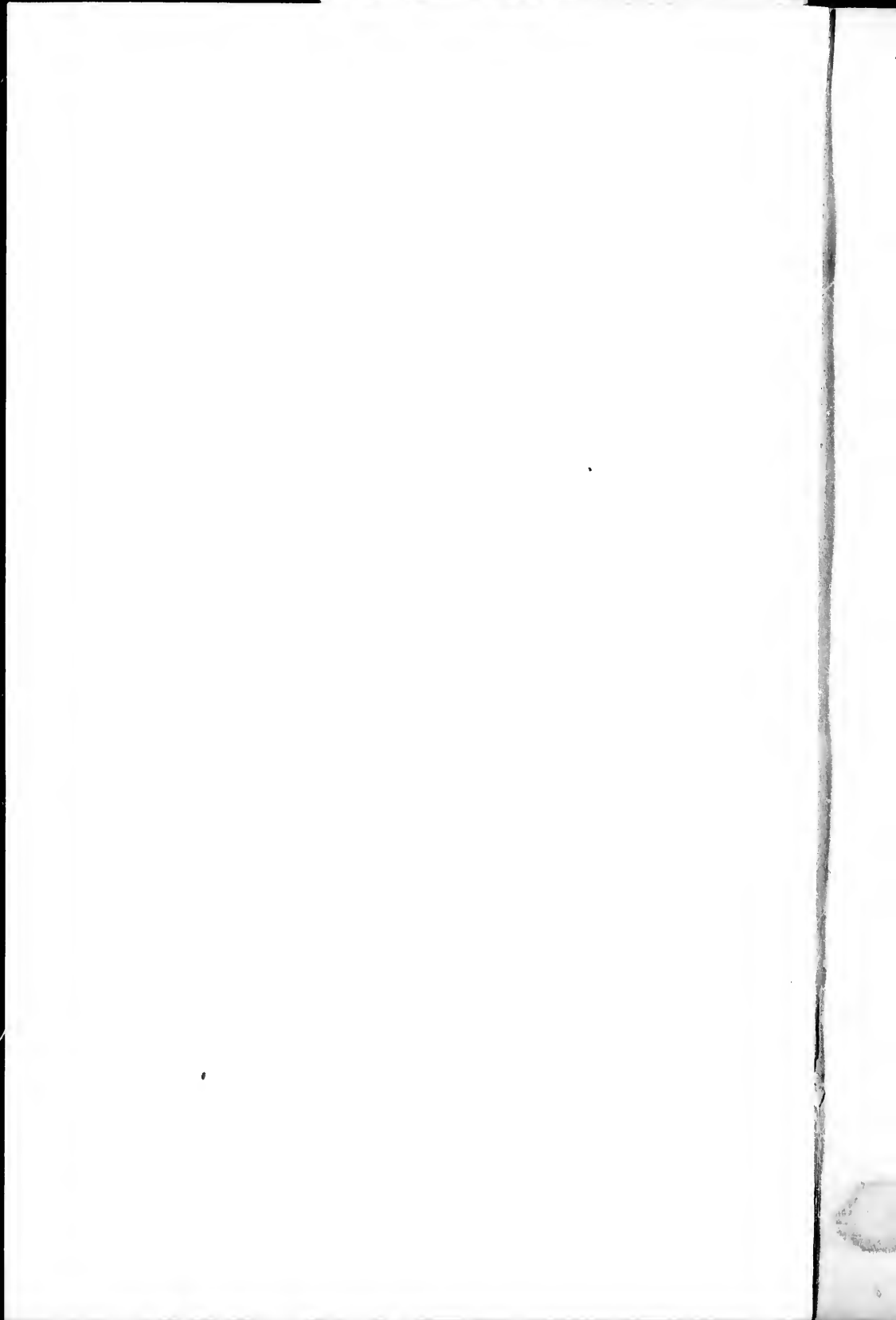
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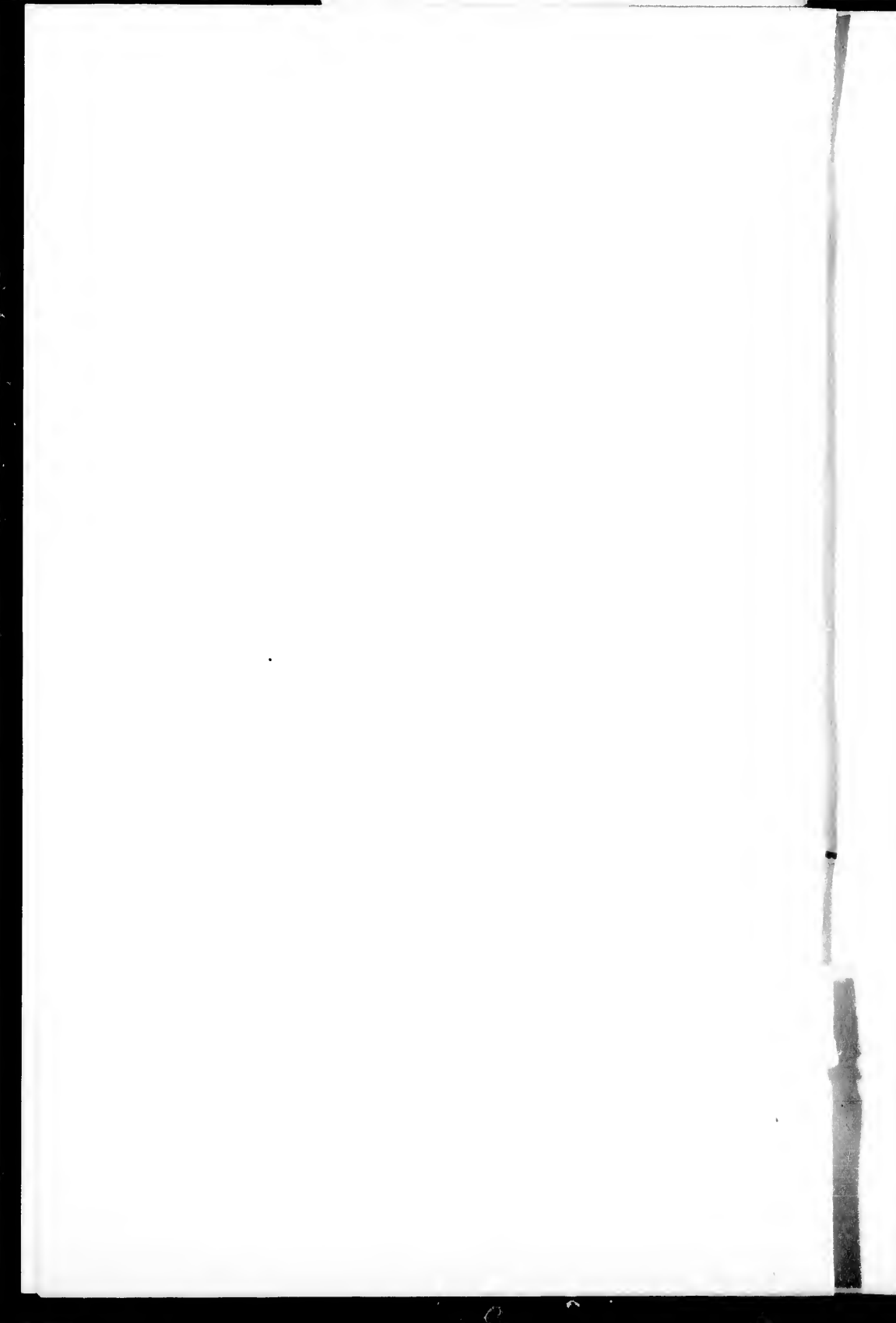
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The Schuylkill Gun and its Indian Motto.

BY HORATIO HALE.

Reprinted from the American Antiquarian, January, 1896



THE SCHUYLKILL GUN AND ITS INDIAN MOTTO.

BY HORATIO HALE.

The earliest inscription in the language of any Indian people north of Mexico is, I believe, that which appears on the remarkable piece of artillery belonging to "the State in Schuylkill." This is the rather peculiar name which has long been familiar to Philadelphians as the usual title of what they believe to be "the oldest social club in the world." That such a club should have its existence in a city dedicated, by its name and its origin, to fraternity, is not surprising. The chartered title of the club is "The Schuylkill Fishing Company of the State in Schuylkill." The history which explains this singular title, and records the still more singular fortunes of the gun connected with it, is told in a large and well printed and illustrated octavo volume, published in 1889. The volume is in part a reissue of an older history of the association, written by William Morris, Jr., and published in 1830. This history was revised, continued, and republished nearly sixty years later by a committee of the club, among whose most efficient members were "ex-Governor William Camac," and the accomplished secretary, "Citizen William Fisher Lewis."

From this authentic source we learn that the company was formed in 1732 by some of the original settlers of Philadelphia, several of whom had accompanied William Penn as emigrants from the old country, and all of whom, it is needless to say, were devoted disciples and followers of "the venerable and good Mr. Isaac Walton," as he is styled in the Introduction. The company was organized under the name of "The Colony in Schuylkill." Its first meetings for sport and social enjoyment were held on the bank of the Schuylkill River, which then flowed through a forest abounding in game. Here the first club building was erected, a wooden edifice of some architectural pretensions, with belfry and steeple, and known at different periods as the Colonial Hall, the Court House, and finally "the Castle." The company survived the troubles of the colonial period and the vicissitudes of the Revolution. The "Colony" then naturally became a "State;" and under the style of "The State in Schuylkill" the club has continued to flourish

to the present day. In its meetings for business, which are held twice a year, in March and October, and its meetings for fishing and fowling, which are held on every alternate Thursday between the first of May and the October gathering for election of officers, constant good-fellowship prevails; and to ensure this desirable result all discussion of politics or religion is forbidden. The list of its active members has comprised some of the most noted names of Philadelphian celebrity, including several mayors of the city; and among its honorary members and guests it is enough to say that Washington and Lafayette were numbered.

Once only, under the influence of a great personal force, which ranks with those two names in world-wide distinction, the club departed suddenly and widely from its rule against politics. The French war, which aroused all the colonies in the middle of the last century, produced a singular turmoil in Philadelphia, with much distraction of opinion and violent political dissension between those who adhered to the Quaker principle which forbade even defensive war, and those who strongly maintained the righteousness of such war. At the head of the latter was Benjamin Franklin, whose vigorous writings and strong personal influence carried the day. A military association for defense was formed, and a fund was raised for procuring cannons from England to form a battery. It was done, and the "Association Battery," numbering finally fifty pieces, was erected. One of the pieces was contributed by the voluntary subscription of the Schuylkill Colony. It was a 32-pounder, for which, as no cannons were cast in the colonies in those days, the order was sent to England. Singularly enough, the records of the company, which are tolerably complete as regards the election of members and officers, give no account of the proceedings relating to this gun. Its purchase may have been considered a somewhat irregular and merely personal proceeding of the members. But of its origin, which is recorded in Franklin's Gazette of the time, there is no question.

As it happened, the Association Battery was not called into service at the time or for many years after. The theatre of the French war was transferred to Canada, and thirteen years later it was closed by the conquest of that colony. Another like period brought about an unexpected change in the destiny of the gun. It is presumed to have been mounted with the other guns of its battery to defend the city from the ships of

war sent against it by the mother-country, in which the guns themselves had been cast. When the city was captured the guns, of course, came into British hands, but only to be restored to their former possessors when the independence of the colonies was established. The Schuylkill gun might have been confounded with the others, and thus lost to sight and memory, but for a rather remarkable precaution taken by its purchasers in placing an indelible mark upon it, in the unusual form of an Indian motto. They had taken care to have the words "KAWANIA CIE KEETERU" cast upon it in conspicuous letters, surmounted by a crown. By this inscription the gun was identified when it was discovered, nearly a century later,—in May, 1880,—by the council of the Pennsylvania Historical Society. They found it lying in the mud of old Fort Mifflin, in a sadly dilapidated state, a mere "useless piece of old iron," "its trunnions broken, its cascabel gone, and upon the swell of the muzzle the dent of a well-directed British shot." Proceedings were at once taken to redeem the unfortunate torso from the forlorn condition so unworthy of its origin and associations. The General Government, being appealed to, promptly restored the gun to the representatives of its first owners; and when, a few years later, the Fishing Company was obliged by the decline of fishing in the Schuylkill to make its mournful hegira from that river to the neighboring bank of the Delaware, taking with it its name, its castle, its "navy" of fishing boats, and its various other belongings, the venerable gun went with the rest to their new home. Here it was "placed in position," in congenial proximity with "the flag of the United States' steamship Powhatan, carried at the battle of Fort Fisher," which was in the same year (1885) presented to the club by Admiral Godon as a memorial of one of the members of the club. Thus, by an odd concatenation of events, it happened that the most peaceful of all associations, dedicated to good fellowship, and bound rigidly to exclude all politics, has for its most highly prized relics two memorials of great wars, waged with the enthusiastic approval of its members, at periods more than a century apart, and each in its day convulsing the politics of two continents.

With the revived interest in the gun a natural desire arose to learn the true meaning and origin of its mysterious motto. Strange to say, the oblivion into which the gun had fallen extended to the very language of its inscription. It was con-

jectured to be in the language of the Delaware Indians, and its meaning was held to be "This is my right; I will maintain it." It appears that an uncertainty as to its source and meaning, and even as to its proper orthography, existed rather less than twenty years after the gun had been cast; for the Pennsylvania Historical Society possesses a curious "pamphlet in verse" on the French war, published in 1755 by an author bearing the rather gruesome name of Nicholas Scull, who had taken for the "second title" of his poem the motto "*Kawanio che keeteru.*" Of this he says, "The words I have chosen at the head of my title page, I am told by a gentleman skilled in the Indian languages, is very expressive of a HERO relying on God to bless his endeavors in protecting what He has put under his care." To form some idea of its signification," he added, "you may imagine a man with his wife and children about him, and, with an air of resolution, calling out to his enemy, "All these God has given me, and I will defend them."

This learning, it would seem, passed muster in 1755; but in 1888 the skepticism of science had invaded even the quiet State in Schuylkill. The authority of Mr. Scull's anonymous "gentleman skilled in Indian languages," with the affecting and sublime picture presented by his words, did not satisfy them. They had recourse to an authority about whose skill in Indian lore there could be no question. Dr. Brinton, Professor of American Archaeology and Linguistics in the University of Pennsylvania, on being applied to, at once informed the committee that the inscription was not in the Lenape or Delaware language, and advised that it should be submitted to a student who had facilities for investigating the Iroquois tongue. When, in compliance with this recommendation of my distinguished friend, the inscription was sent to me, it was at once apparent that the sentence was in the Iroquois language and that its meaning had been widely misconceived. Mr. Scull's pious and patriotic hero vanished, and in his place appeared a lordly war-chief. The sentence "*Kawanio che keeteru,*" or, as the words would now be more accurately written in the modern missionary orthography, "*Kevennio tsi kiteron,*" means simply, "I am master wherever I am." This must be admitted to be a by no means ill-invented Indian motto for a "big gun," however far it might be from representing the sentiments of the worthy contributors for whom the gun was cast.

The reason why the "Colony in Schuylkill" preferred to get

the inscription for their gun from their Iroquois visitors and allies, rather than from their nearer Delaware neighbors, may be readily conjectured. At the time when the gun was cast, the Delawares, who had once been noted fighters, and at a later period again became such, had ceased to be a warlike people. Either as a result of defeat in war, or, as they themselves affirmed, by their own voluntary act, they had renounced their independence, and had passed under the protection and control of the powerful Iroquois League. The tribes of this renowned confederacy, then known as the "Six Nations"—the Tuscaroras having been admitted into their league—were at that time in intimate and friendly communication with the government and people of Pennsylvania. In June, 1744, a large delegation of the confederates, headed by the famous chief Canasatego, came to Lancaster to treat with the governor of the colony, in conjunction with commissioners from Maryland and Virginia, on the subject of the French war, which had just commenced. On this occasion the noted Indian agent, Conrad Weiser, of Philadelphia, was interpreter. He must have been well known to the members of the Schuylkill Company; and when they desired to have their war-gift for the public defense signalized by some appropriate motto of unmistakable origin, it was natural that they should seek this inscription in the language of their warlike allies, especially as they had at hand a capable interpreter, well qualified to furnish it. The spelling shows plainly that it was not written by a missionary, but by a person of some cultivation, accustomed, apparently, to both the English and the German orthography.

In the light of these facts the Schuylkill gun becomes exalted from a mere useless piece of metal to a relic and monument of much historical importance. The confederate tribes, whose friendship and capacity were thus strikingly acknowledged, were then at the height of that reputation for valor and policy which had been growing for more than a century. When we bear in mind that during the entire period from the first settlement of the English colonies to the conquest of Canada they held the balance of power in North America, and by their action mainly decided that the whole continent north of Mexico should be British, Protestant, and free, and not a French Catholic despotism, the debt which the cause of liberty and good government owes to these aboriginal federal republicans will be better appreciated. Viewed in connection with the momentous events which signalized its earlier existence, and of which it was at once a product and a memorial, the Schuylkill gun may be fairly deemed a symbol of free thought. For a symbol representing this all-powerful force its motto would seem to be no idle boast, but to affirm a strictly philosophical truth,—“I am master wherever I am.”

